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ABSTRACT

During recent years, colleges and universities have developed first-year seminars for students entering as freshmen, and some of these seminars are linked with disciplinary courses in a learning community. For 2 years, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) has had a one-credit-hour university orientation course entitled "First Year Success Seminar," which is linked with a 3-hour section of "Fundamentals of Speech Communication." The same students enroll in both courses and the units in the courses are coordinated. The project is known as the "Mentor Program" because each section has an instructional team that interacts as a group of mentors to those student enrollees who are in its particular learning community. The core curriculum components are: (1) academic writing; (2) oral communication; (3) university library; (4) academic career and life planning; (5) computer technology; (6) critical thinking; (7) culture of the academy (including academic integrity); (8) collaboration and the development of campus networks; and (9) comprehensive introduction to the university's resources. From fall 1995 to fall 1997, enrollees were tracked to determine how many were retained up to spring semester 1998. In all semesters except the first one, seminar participants were retained by a significantly higher percentage. Data collected on grades at the end of the fall 1997 semester showed that seminar participants also earned a higher percentage of high grades than non-participants who were also new to IUPUI. (Contains 2 tables of data and 9 references.) (CR)

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Fundamentals of Communication and First Year Success Seminar: Perspective from a faculty member of linked courses

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

INTRODUCTION

One of the most pervasive phenomena in higher education during recent years has been the development and implementation of first year seminars for students entering colleges and universities as freshmen and for those resuming undergraduate studies after being away from campus for some time. Motivations for offering such courses are multiple: to attract and retain students in a time of dwindling or uncertain traditional student enrollments; to more greatly assure students' academic success by enhancing their requisite skills; to orient them to available campus resources; to familiarize them with curricular and programmatic opportunities; to establish a support network with students, faculty and staff; and to assist them in selecting and planning appropriate careers.

In an extensive 1997 survey, 939 institutions out of 1,336 respondents, over 70%, indicated that they now offer a special course for first year students, a course with such titles as "first year seminar, colloquium, or student success course" (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 1998a).

The composition and configuration of such courses can vary greatly. Some are within specific disciplines, some are independent from any disciplines, and yet others link a first year seminar with disciplinary courses in a learning community. The above-noted survey recorded that 14% of the schools with first year seminars offer them on such a linked basis(1998a). That is the case with the courses I have taught for the past two years. Each semester, I teach

a one credit hour university orientation course entitled "First Year Success Seminar," which is linked with a three hour section of "Fundamentals of Speech Communication." The same students enroll in both courses and the units in the courses are coordinated.

This paper will focus on the linked courses which I teach, but it also will suggest other ways in which our discipline can cooperate with and contribute to first year seminar courses regardless of their configuration or linkage.

THE IUPUI PROGRAM

Before focusing on the communication-linked course, per se, a context is given by explaining the program within which it is featured. U110, First Year Success Seminar, a one semester-hour offering, was jointly developed in 1995 by our University College (then the Undergraduate Education Center) and the School of Liberal Arts, where the Department of Communication Studies is situated. In Fall, 1995, the Program began with seven "learning communities," all from the School of Liberal Arts. By Fall, 1996, the University College had become the umbrella for all the newly-developing "college success" programs of this type on campus,
including those in Science and Engineering (Williams, February 10, 1998). By Fall, 1998, seventy learning communities and seventeen hundred students were scheduled into the program.

From the outset, the project was known as the "Mentor Program." That is because each section has had an "instructional team" that interacts as a group of mentors to those student enrollees

who are in its particular "learning community." The instructional team consists of (1) a faculty member,who is the instructor of record, (2) a student-peer mentor, (3) a counselor from the University College, and (4) a University Librarian. All four instructional team members serve as mentors, giving unique guidance and expertise from their relative perspectives.

Until Fall, 1998, a representative from Integrated Technologies also was assigned to each section to address more specialized aspects of computer research and listserv. Now, a specially designed technical service, ONCOURSE, has been made available for each course, and members of the instructional teams, primarily the student-peer mentors, are trained to pass working knowledge of it along to enrollees. Also, the University College now has a "Technology and Client Support Analyst" available full-time.

As aforementioned, mine are linked sections. The designers of the program arranged these sections so "students [could] enroll concurrently in a specific [UC] section as well as a specified section of a departmental freshman course. [They] linked [UC] sections with the required composition and communication courses as well as introductory courses in political science, psychology, anthropology, history and economics" (Evenbeck & Jackson, 1996, pp. 4-5).

For all of our first-year seminars, whether linked or standing alone, there is a unified set of goals that "have the cumulative effect of promoting a positive adjustment and assimilation to the University." These range from developing various skills, to respecting diversity, open exchange of ideas, collegiality, and academic integrity.

Our IUPUI program identified a set of CORE CURRICULUM COMPONENTS that were essential for achieving the above-mentioned goals (Evenbeck & Jackson, 1998). Each section normally is to contain these components:

1. Academic Writing
2. Oral Communication
3. University Library
4. Academic Career and Life Planning
5. Computer Technology
6. Critical Thinking
7. Culture of the Academy--including academic integrity
8. Collaboration and the development of campus networks
9. Comprehensive introduction to IUPUI's resources

Thus, as we embarked on our project of developing a communication section linked to a one-hour first year seminar, we did so with the understanding that communication was an inherent part of the overall University College program, and our syllabi might feature communication units or experiences in one or the other or both linked sections.

R110: COMMUNICATION/U110: FIRST YEAR SUCCESS SEMINAR

Just as our University's program recognizes oral communication as a central component to achieving goals of a first year seminar, other programs place the need for it in their course. The National Resource Center for First Year Experiences has featured the web

pages of first year programs at thirty colleges and universities around the U.S., of all sizes, types, and locations, from Arizona State University to Yale (1998b). A perusal of their program descriptions shows consistent references to having students "develop communication and listening skills . . . .", "develop skills of argumentation . . . ." , "improve communication skills . . . ." , "understand communication and learning styles . . . ." , "demonstrate improvement in written and oral communication . . . ." , "focus on ways of thinking through [the process of] listening, writing, speaking, and participating with others . . . ." , and give oral presentations to enhance "clarity, cohesiveness, organization, rapport, and appropriate verbal/nonverbal skills."

In short, when participants from our discipline design a communication course to be linked with a first-year experience course, they most probably will need to feature communication units in each that are compatible with one another and combine to maximize the experience.

CONTRIBUTIONS IN LINKED COMMUNICATION COURSE R110

Of the numerous aforementioned goals and components of first year courses, several especially are related to our disciplinary course in oral communication. Although all are incorporated to various degrees in both linked sections, those noted here are the ones emphasized in the syllabus for Fundamentals of Speech Communication.

Mentor. Each member of the instructional team adds uniqueness without which the course would be less effective. This especially is true when considering the role assumed in R110 by the student mentor ,who attends all R110 sessions along with the instructor. Speaking in public is a special challenge, often a traumatic one, for most people, and arguably the difficulty is compounded for first year students entering a university environment which makes new demands of a personal, intellectual, technical and logistic nature.

With a student mentor, we attempt to alleviate these problems as much as possible by having a peer who is (1) a model student, (2) an excellent speaker, and (3) a personable and empathic companion for the enrollees. Because she is a communication major, with a background in courses that feature requirements parallel with those we build into our basic course, our mentor is prepared to interact with the students from the earliest stages of brainstorming for topics, through discourse development, all the way to practicing of presentations. As a motivation for students to get involved at the outset of each discourse, we schedule a sample presentation by our student mentor each time an assignment is explained and the specific set of speaking dates is given. Incidentally, the mentor is directed not to function as a tutor, i.e., a private teacher or instructor of the subject, but instead as a guide for the students' understanding and application of classroom materials.

Related Units. Of those "curricular components" that the first year seminar teams are required to address in their "End of Semester Report," the ones we emphasize more strongly in R110 are "Oral

Communication, University Library, Critical Thinking, and Academic Integrity."

Oral Communication Component. Group process and interpersonal communication are integral to both courses, but especially U110, the First Year Seminar. By definition, the R110, disciplinary course, focuses on presentational aspects of oral communication. Students develop preparation outlines and present required forms and types of speeches. Students are able to undergo the presentational training that is widely required of our University's undergraduate students while receiving the personalized attention of the instructor, student mentor, and the librarian in those areas where those team members' respective resources are essential to the assignments. The substance of oral presentations, including the unique aspects of organization, support, and style of speechmaking are emphasized, along with the other elements of oral discourse that are significantly different from their counterparts in writing. And, of course, by regularly presenting speeches on an individual basis, the student can develop delivery skills which cannot and should not be separated from content, as could be the unfortunate case when speaking is attached as an ancillary unit of a non-communication course.

Computer Component. It is becoming a truism that university students must have a knowledge of technology if they are to succeed in classes and thereafter. With this in mind, our institution has developed computer clusters for students at several strategic locations throughout the campus, and has made computers an integral part of our new library. Moreover, with the development of

the software system called ONCOURSE, our campus offers a convenient method to create a web site for every course offered. Each web site automatically includes a roster of registered students, faculty, and staff affiliated with the class, along with their photos if desired. They can access the course web site from anywhere via the Internet by entering their assigned User Network ID's. A user profile homepage is assigned to each registered user; the profile includes such features as virtual bookmarks for storage of frequently used web addresses, easy maintenance of documents and pages on the internet. Each web site also provides facilities for chat mail and conferencing, and a toolbox containing a variety of tools including online testing and a variety of electronic resources unique to specific courses, available through our University Library or other digital libraries around the world.

All members of both of our linked sections are on one web site, where announcements and other communication take place. Students learn much of the ONCOURSE operation in the First Year Success Seminar section.

Yet, those aspects of technology that are more directly applicable to the communication class are incorporated there. For instance, our enrollees learn and are encouraged to use power point in their speechmaking. Our Office of Integrated Technologies provides power point equipment, both PC and Mac compatible, for student presentations. Likewise, our class has a standing order for video equipment to record each student presentation, and each student brings his/her own videotape to capture the presentation for self analysis. For those who do not have VCR equipment at home,

playback devices are provided in labs on campus. In short, the R110 portion of the course allows a more complete application of technology. So, in addition to the ONCOURSE and computer communication derived in the success seminar, which can consume a large percentage of time needed for university student orientation, our linked R110 section makes the student much more computer literate with assignments involving powerpoint and multimedia presentations. And we believe this is in the spirit of our First Year Seminar Program.

Critical Thinking Component. First Year Seminar textbooks have some units for studying data and reasoning from data to valid conclusions. Yet, these segments understandably tend to be brief and somewhat abstract. For instance, the book we use in our seminar briefly notes such aspects of critical thinking as abstract, creative, and systematic thinking, and precise communication of thought (1998, Gardner & Jewler). In our linked communication course, as in any oral communication course, emphasis is put on acquiring supporting materials for each discourse, and determining the tests for the various types of examples, statistics, and testimony. Students need to know what constitutes evidence, deductive reasoning, and how to reason inductively from specific instances and circumstantial evidence, and how to advance causal and analogical arguments, all the while avoiding fallacies. Such material is be part of other disciplines as well as ours. Yet, we construct our syllabi with the conviction that a stronger mastery of the critical thinking process can be achieved if applied by a student of oral communication to

target audiences while considering such factors as their knowledge, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs.

Academic integrity. All seminars can and should address the subject of academic integrity as well as student rights and responsibilities. We distribute the University's handbook on the subject in the seminar section, and define cheating, lying, and other forms of dishonesty and misconduct. Yet, a significant portion of the academic integrity subject, including plagiarism, is dealt with more thoroughly in communication class. We focus on ethics in communication, establishing standards for honest and fair-practice in speaking as well as ethical guidelines in listening--guidelines of courtesy, attentiveness, and openness, whether listening to a student speaker or anyone else. Again, the regular practice of these principles of ethics and integrity in communication contexts, adds a strong learning dimension.

University Library. A final added dimension we give is to the library component. Most classes, including a success seminar itself, can orient students to the campus library and related sources, including those on the internet. Beyond the need for clarity and accuracy of research material, the documentation for which must appear in the bibliography of research projects, the communication student learns to find and state, at appropriate places within an oral discourse, the qualifications of the source cited in order to establish credibility and/or probity. This aids in the critical thinking process, and especially becomes challenging when addressing audiences that are apathetic, critical, or hostile to one's asserted position on issues.

By having a librarian on our instructional team, we can be more assured that students can develop a working knowledge of where and how to find materials to establish assertions for such judicious audiences.

CONTRIBUTIONS IN FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE U110

The service our discipline can extend to the Mentor Program does not end with the linked basic course. My instructional team and I apply our training to the seminar portion as well. Perhaps more important, here, is what members of our discipline in general might offer such seminars in light of their training and expertise. They have backgrounds in areas that are chief among those advocated for the first year program. Perhaps foremost is the area of group dynamics. For instance, as a "Learning Outcome," for first year seminars, the Template for first year seminars at IUPUI, indicates that "Students should be able to...participate in small and large group discussions" (Anderson, et al 1998, p. 6).

This professional organization (NCA) has an "Interpersonal and Small Group Interaction Division, " devoted to promoting and facilitating the communication process between individuals and among groups. Members of my faculty, myself included, and many others in our discipline have taught interpersonal communication, discussion and group dynamics, decision-making, negotiation and

other courses that enhance the communication outcomes noted in our Template. Thus, their ability to foster and facilitate discussion in a "stand-alone" seminar, notwithstanding the nature or controversialness of the subject or issue, could be extremely valuable. The Template's very first learning outcome pertains to the student's ability to "understand the foundation values of the academic community, including the open exchange of ideas and knowledge and a respect for diversity" (Anderson, et al, 1998, p. 54). As many do, the textbook for our seminar devotes a chapter to "Diversity on Campus." It discusses such subjects as discrimination and prejudice vis-a-vis cultural and ethnic diversity. The NCA also has an "International and Intercultural Communication Division," which encompasses co-cultural or sub-cultural relationships, such as ethnic and racial ones in the U.S. It addresses the very diversity issues that are a primary concern of the first year seminar.

SOME OVERALL MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

While the first year success seminar at IUPUI is still in its developmental stages, there have been some attempts to measure comparative retention rates and grades earned by participants. Retention of program enrollees in all UC-related courses, stand-alone and link, from all disciplines, including communication, was measured by IUPUI's Information Management and Institutional Research (1997). Over the five semesters, starting with Fall, 1995, and ending with Fall, 1997, the enrollees were tracked to determine how many were retained up to Spring Semester, 1998. In all

semesters except the first one, the participants in the Seminar were retained by a significantly higher percentage:

TABLE 1

LEARNING COMMUNITIES RETENTION TO SPRING 1998

"NEW TO IU" PREPARATORY STUDENTS

	FALL 95		SPRING 96		FALL 96		SPRING 97		FALL 97	
		%		%		%		%		%
	Retained		Retained		Retained		Retained		Retained	
	n	to Sprg 98	n	to Sprg 98	n	to Sprg 98	n	to Sprg 98	n	to Sprg 98
Participants	133	26.3%	95	34.7%	309	46.0%	164	46.3%	558	78.9%
Non-Participants*	924	34.3%	262	28.2%	1193	40.9%	299	38.1%	619	75.3%
p.level**		0.06749		0.23668		0.10892		0.08569		0.14627

*Non-participants include students enrolled in non-learning community sections of courses offering learning communities

**p.level associated with chi-square test for independence of retained vs. non-retained students by groups (df=1)

University College collected data on grades at the end of the 1997 Fall Semester (1997). The percentage of higher grades earned by Learning Community students outside their learning community classes was significantly higher than those earned by the Non-Learning Community Enrollees who were also "new to IU"

preparatory students. The LC enrollees had nearly 8% more A's and B's, and 8.5% fewer D's, F's, and W's.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE GRADE DISTRIBUTION IN LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND ALL OTHER COURSES

UECP MATRICES FALL SEMESTER 1997

GRADE	LC	OTHER COURSES FOR LC ENROLLEES	ALL COURSES FOR NON-LC ENROLLEES
A	29.1	16.1	12.5
B	25.2	23.3	19.3
C	14.8	20.9	20.1
D	4.1	5.7	6.2
F	16.8	20.2	27.4
W	10.0	13.7	14.5
TOTAL	100.0	99.9	100.0
DFW	30.9	39.6	48.1
# Students	650	650	914
#Grades	650	2322	3107

While the aforementioned data are preliminary and undoubtedly will be refined in the future, there is reason for optimism. And we in Communication Studies share in that optimism.

CONCLUSION

While primarily focusing on the communication portion of the linked course, this paper has attempted to suggest the ways in which our discipline can contribute to first year seminars in general. Skills of presentational speaking, along with special emphases on technical communication such as power point and multi-media; ethics, along with communication ethos and special plagiarism policies, library research and documentation in oral communication all are elements taught in our fundamentals course that can supplement and enhance the first year seminar section.

While mainly passing references have been made herein to the first-year seminar section, per se, one can envision where entire curricular units in it could be fashioned by persons with integrally related expertise in our discipline. Moreover, in the interdisciplinary spirit prevailing on campuses today, members of our discipline could share knowledge and materials with faculty from other academic areas concerning such subjects as group dynamics, diversity vis-a-vis communication, conflict negotiation, interpersonal communication and nonverbal and verbal communication. Conceivably ,

communication training or workshops might even be offered to prospective student-peer mentors from all areas of the program.

In short, this discipline can and should contribute greatly to the growing effort in this nation to provide first year seminar or orientation training in colleges and universities. Designers of the IUPUI program appeared to have us in mind when they stressed that "the academic nature of IUPUI first year seminars may be clearly seen in their emphasis on critical thinking, academic communication, and the challenge of general education" (1998, Anderson, et al., p. 3).

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